

For Ms. Kendrick

I do not know when this letter will arrive to you, but in April of 2006 you had come to read to us students at Lake Braddock Secondary School and to give us your advice on writing poetry. That was the first time, that I can remember, seeing and hearing a voice of the published, and it was a noteworthy experience. You speak so empathetically with the writing! I admire your ability; nothing was forced, nothing was trite or redundant. Liberating! Those are inspiring words, truly.

I have a newfound frenzy to feed on literature of all sorts, and a newfound aspiration to become an English teacher. It's come to my realization that every human being to cross my path has in some way left a mark of influence. Genuinely, you will have been one of my stepping stones through this earth; whatever accomplishment I may achieve will bear a letter of your name as well.

  
—David Moore

Mrs. Kendrick,

"Poetry takes you where it wants to go, not where you want to go."

I've always had a problem with poems. I spend several minutes at the computer just thinking, "What is the perfect image to reflect my meaning?" After a few minutes, when nothing seems to fit, I lose interest in my writing. And, I become so frustrated and disheartened that I discover myself trudging on just to finish it. And, at the end, I am ALWAYS disappointed in what I've written.

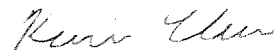
So, this advice struck me. As you said, "A poet only has words." I must interact with the poem objectively, and not try to limit it to focus only on what I want it to become. Like a person, the poem must develop on its own. I am just there for guidance and nourishment. Poems should be hard, but shouldn't.

So, I want to thank you for giving a voice to your "On Becoming." Thank you for pointing out these key pieces of advice to me, and showing me how they intertwine.

I was just about to give up on writing poems.

"Poems may make demands upon you that will challenge your creativity."

Thank You,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kevin Chen".


Kevin Chen '07

P.S. And, thank you for the reading.

5/3/06

Dear Ms. Kendrick,

It was an honor to hear your works read aloud, to hear the words expressed as you intended them to be, to hear the passion and emotion that went into every line of verse. It was an experience for me, who had never heard a poet read aloud his or her works before, and it was an inspiration, as I have never been one to have much power and confidence when I read my poetry and prose aloud, even just in front of my small writing class. Your readings were moving (I especially liked the "Zithromax Waltz") and your side stories insightful, though I think what really gets me is how you can stay in one frame of mind for so long, how you can just keep putting all of these same-themed poems to paper and never tire or slip up, never write something that doesn't shine, never write something that has no greater meaning symbolically and to you, and I deeply admire how seriously you look at life and your work— I hope you will come back to speak to Lake Braddock again!

  
Amanda Keller

Dear Ms. Kendrick,

I had never been to a poetry reading until yours, and I have to say that I was absolutely missing out! I really, deeply enjoyed your presentation and I really appreciated it. So, thank you, thank you, thank you very much!

In class occasionally we have someone who has volunteered go up and read out one of their poems, and though some people have a natural dramatic flair which can bring their words to life, oftentimes, my peers and I stutter our way through our words, brows furrowed, as if unsure of our own work. Your self-confidence was brilliant and inspiring. You brought the characters in your poems to life because you were your characters and there wasn't a person seated in the audience who could deny it. Your absolute certainty in your words is something that I can only hope and wish and pray to achieve one day.

I loved the poem you wrote about the cleaning women. Poetry isn't something you make sometimes, it's something you find. That piece was so whole-hearted and tangible. Poems should be like that, something you can really feel. I'm going to try to find more inspiration around me instead of inside of me because of the whole concept of that poem.

Thank you again, so very much for coming to Lake Braddock and sharing your work with us. The position of Poet Laureate was something I had heard about and seen on book jackets before, but had never really understood, and your explanation of your job really helped show that it's more than just about the poems. I hope to see you again next year if you should come to visit again!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Priya Patel', with a stylized flourish at the end.

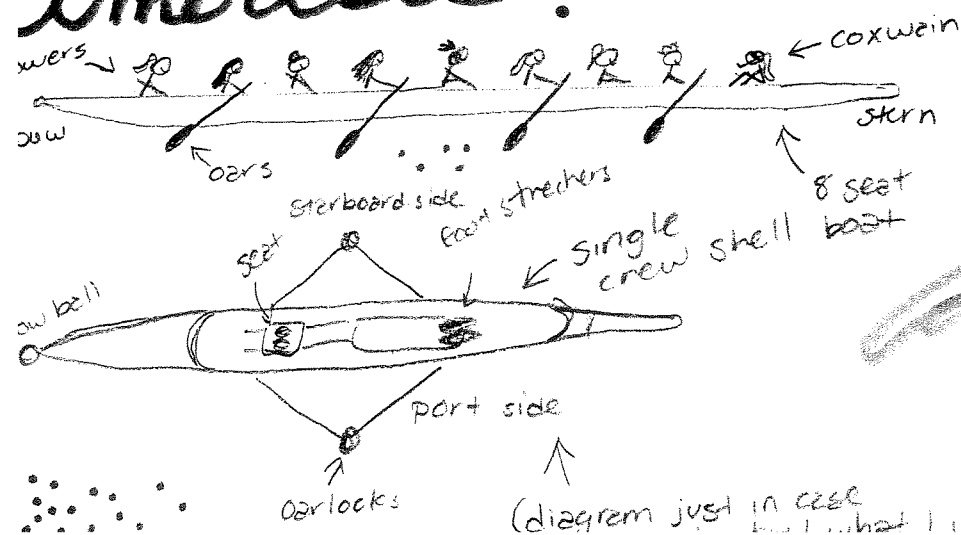
Priya Patel

Dear



Ms. Kendrick,

I greatly appreciate you coming to Lake Braddock Secondary School and reading some of your fabulous poetry! I really liked the letters the slaves sent to each other. How you were able to bring such life to your writing is an inspiration. You are a great role model to the youth of America!



Yours Truly

*Coitlin Goodson*

Coitlin Goodson  
(the crew girl!)

Dear Ms. Kendrick,

Thank you so much for coming to read to our class this year! I can't tell you how much I enjoyed hearing you read your own poems the way you envisioned them when you wrote them, as opposed to hearing a classmate or teacher interpret them in your place. Hearing you read your poems really brought them to life, especially your poems from Women of Plums.

I loved how you answered my question about how often you write. You said that you didn't write with a set schedule nor did you ever sit down and force yourself to write something from scratch, but waited for true inspiration to guide your writing. That comment helped me a lot, because many times when a teacher says to my class, "Ok, write for 45 minutes," I often have a hard time with that.

Most of my writing is inspired, and usually comes out in song form. I play the mandolin, guitar, and piano, and many times will find myself playing a song and singing lyrics spontaneously. It is one of the greatest joys of my life.

Once again, thanks for reading to us. I hope you understand how much of an inspiration you are to all those who know you and your work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jonathan Gardner". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Dear Dolores Kendrick,

Thank you for your time in coming to speak to the students of Lake Braddock. It was an honor to hear from you. Your advice for young poets was extremely helpful and oddly enough, addressed almost all the issues and challenges I have confronted as a beginning writer.

Listening to you read from Women of Plums was inspiring, to say the least. It was the first time I had ever heard a published writer speak, and it was encouraging.

I am a "perfectionist", and hearing your advice to allow the poem to come alive and to avoid being too over-controlling was something I really needed to hear.

I love literature and want to major in English; listening to you read your poetry was a valuable experience that I'm sure I'll never forget.

Once again I thank you for coming to speak to us; it was greatly appreciated. Thank you for remembering the kids! Keep up the amazing work you have done and still are doing in D.C.!

God Bless.

Sara Park  
Sara Park

Dear Ms. Kendrick,

Thank you for coming and having a special reading for me and my Lakebraddock classmates. I personally enjoyed the way you delivered your poetry, and the confidence that was brought out in your voice. Being an African American I love seeing my fellow African Americans break barriers and do things that were once banned and illegal for us to do. I loved your reading of "Women of Plums" because the voice is so strong and written the way I could imagine slaves talk, and the way they really did speak. When you read "Cleaning Women" some of the diction surprised me because it was so perfectly placed together and it all flowed so well. Thanks for all of the important advice you gave us, and I will continue to follow them as I soon go off to college and perfect my writing there.

Thank you Again,

TERESSA MCCOY




Dear Ms. Kendrick,

I attended the poetry reading you gave at Lake Braddock on April 25<sup>th</sup>. I would like to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to come and share your work with us. It was one of the first poetry readings I can ever recall attending and I found it to be both interesting and inspirational. Being able to hear an author read his or her own writing truly makes a difference in the vivacity of the piece, making the experience infinitely greater for the listener. I really enjoyed how you read and presented your work; it gave the poems such feeling and shape that I think would be lost otherwise. Also, I thought it was nice that you had a varied repertoire; although, I enjoyed poems from The Women of Plums the most.

This has been the first year that I really believe I've had a fondness for working with poetry in school. Taking Advanced Composition has definitely improved all my forms of writing, but particularly poetry. One thing that I found especially helpful was your discussion with our class before the reading. Your views on the poetry process were unique and I really like your advice on letting the poem take you where it wants to go. It's an approach that I don't believe young writers ever hear.

Thank you, your advice and poetry has further increased my interest in writing and helped me to find a new way to approach my own work. I really enjoyed the reading and I wish you the best of luck with your continuing career.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Regan Frake". The ink is dark and the writing is fluid.

Regan Frake,  
Lake Braddock High School Student

Dear, Dolores Kendrick

I'd like to genuinely thank you with all of my heart, well that which is not reserved for family, for coming to read at Lake Braddock Secondary School. The experience was enriching emotionally, culturally, and intellectually. The poetry you write and read is always thoughtful and emotionally charged. When you read your poem "Sidney, Looking For Her Mother" you presented the poem in a monologue greater than any actor is capable of, you became Sidney and expressed a wide range of emotions, her intelligence, wit, bravery, and determination, as well as fear and tenderness. It helped me to really feel the tragedy of slavery and those times even though I'm white, and I can probably never truly comprehend as long as I live comfortably. The honesty of your presentation also appealed to me and my sense of integrity, you were true to yourself and that helped me to reinforce my own integrity and confidence. I hope to become a writer and your presentation I think instilled me with passion. When I become a writer I hope to visit schools across the nation, across the world to help inspire the next generation like you inspire.

Sincerely,

*Michael B. Kerig*

Michael Kerig Mr. Mariani's 7<sup>th</sup> period

Dear Ms. Kendrick,

Much like everyone else, I want to thank you for taking the time to come all the way out to Lake Braddock and share you words, experiences, and poetry with our culture-deprived kids. Your words truly have an amazing power and I think that power is just made so much stronger by you reading your own words in the way you feel they were meant to be read.

As a general rule, I don't consider myself a fan of poetry (a statement which I'm sure is borderline profanity by many standards.) Yet your poetry felt accessible in a way few others' have, making it enjoyable and understandable—something that doesn't need to be analyzed and dissected in order to find the meaning and truth behind it. Your determination and motivation are truly an inspiration driving people to embrace words, not abuse them, to use language, not neglect it, and, perhaps, to pay a little more attention to the creativity and the poetry whenever it decides to take over and force the thoughts and emotions onto paper.

I thank you again for your time and commitment—it truly means a lot to me that I was given the chance to hear you speak.

Take care,

Carolyn Wright

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Carolyn Wright', written over the printed name.

Dear Mrs. Kendrick

I would like to thank you for taking time out from your busy schedule to come read to us here at Lake Braddock. I have never been a big fan of most kinds of poetry, but I did find your creations entertaining and interesting. In fact, for several of your poems I couldn't help but sit up and listen in rapt attention. Recently I have begun experimenting with dramatic monologues, my most recent one is along the lines of something that Edgar Allen Poe or Steven King would come up with. Once again, thank you very much for coming to our school; I know it means a lot to Mr. Mariani and all of us.

Sincerely  
TJ McCurdy

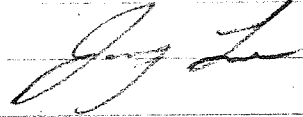
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'TJ McCurdy', with a stylized, sweeping flourish extending from the end.

P.S. The day after you came my friends and I saw United 93 and I remembered your new poem comparing 9/11 to slavery, I anticipate its release.

Dear Mrs. Kendrick,

Thank you for finding time from your busy schedule to visit here and share your work with us. It was very meaningful and profound experience to meet, hear, and shake hands with the accomplished and prominent poet. I have formulated my own "Dolores Kendrick" from your works Mr. Mariani shared with the class, but you proved to be quite different and refreshing. I especially enjoyed hearing you read. As you read, the stories no longer remained mere stories. Written words became motions and sounds; characters began to speak and move. It was a priceless experience.

To me, who English is not a native language, poetry is most difficult and, yet, mystifying. I am attracted by its subtlety and enigma poetry possess, and meeting you and hearing your works consolidated my desire to truly understand and appreciate poetry.

Thank You,  
  
Jong Lee

June 1, 2005

Dear Mrs. Kendrick,

Thank you for visiting Lake Braddock. Your poetry has interested me ever since our class visited the African American Writers exhibit in Washington, D.C. and we heard you read poems from *The Women of Plums*. I was excited to meet you and hear your advice. I appreciated your honesty, wisdom, and love for the art of poetry. You presented a fresh perspective of poetry not taken by other writers.

Before you visited our school, I had never heard of a "broadside," met a writer whose work was to be carved in stone, or met a Poet Laureate. You therefore taught me about what it is to be a publicly successful poet. At the same time, you stressed that poets should not obsess over publication or fitting into a literary movement, but should understand that their poetry will reach publication if they are committed to the art. This is an important lesson, especially in our society where people tend to want quick, effortless success. I learned from you that poetry first and foremost requires patience, discipline, and recognition as an art form. Poetry cannot be viewed as a pathway to fame and fortune.

Three of your pieces of advice and anecdotes stand out in particular to me. First, you encourage young writers to follow their vision and let the writing, embodied in that vision, take them for a ride. What a fresh look at writing! I'm not usually courageous enough to allow my voice to emerge and let the writing take me where it wants. I will strive to do this when writing my next poem. You have encouraged me to take a risk when writing poetry. Second, you stress having the discipline to see poetry as an art form. I need to work toward that discipline. Third, you shared your experience of how "art chose you," when you channeled your slave ancestors and heard their dialect. This relates back to a vision. I aspire to be a strong enough writer to let my writing carry me down such a path someday.

Your character inspired me. You listened to three of my classmates' dramatic monologues and, at the end of each, asked them thought-provoking questions and gave them solid advice. I respect that you complimented them where compliments were warranted, but did not shower them with praise simply because they tried hard or are budding writers, as many adults would have. As developing writers, we need constructive criticism rather than applause at every attempt we make. I also admire your appreciation for words, language, and poetry as an art form, which you stressed in your fifteen pieces of advice. Your commitment to language and words, from correct grammar and spelling to figures of speech, encourages me to better respect the English language in my own writing. It also emphasizes your discipline and commitment to poetry. Finally, your humility is a model for everyone, whether writers or not. Despite being a Poet Laureate, widely published, and featured in an African American Writers exhibit, among many other honors, you still remind writers to, "Avoid becoming a celebrity through words, nourish the celebrity of words." You also say you were honored, more so than when you

received various awards, when the cleaning lady at the Kennedy Center wanted a copy of your poem, "Cleaning Woman."

Thank you once again for coming to our school and sharing your wisdom.

Sincerely,

*Jessica Pritchett*

Jessica Pritchett

Dear Mrs. Kendrick,

My name is Dana Jones.  
I am a Senior in Mr. Mariani's  
advanced composition class.

Unfortunately I was unable to hear  
you speak as I was absent from  
school that day. Although I  
was unable to hear you speak,

I have read many of your poems  
which Mr. Mariani shared with me.  
I think they are spectacular and  
I enjoyed them very much.

I just wanted to say thank-  
you for taking the time to  
speak to my classmates. I  
have heard nothing but rave  
reviews and I wish I  
could have been there.

Thank-you again.

Sincerely,

*Dana Jones*  
Dana Jones



Dear Mrs. Kendrick,

Thank you so much for coming to Lake Braddock for a reading. I thoroughly enjoyed your lesson on advice for writers, and will be applying those rules to my future endeavors in writing.

I really enjoyed the poems you read & The Women of Plums. I love the strong sense of voice that each of those poems have.

Thank you for coming, and I hope to be able to hear you again.

Sincerely,

Erin Burniston

Dear Ms. Kendrick,

Thank you so much for speaking to our class last Tuesday, April 25, 2006. I was moved and very much appreciated by your poetry, and your explanations about your work. I know your "Poet to Poet" worksheet will help me out in the long run when I'm writing poetry. Your tips are very helpful and I will take much advantage of them. I hope you will come back next year to read more of your poetry.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Deborah Krat". The signature is fluid and connected, with the first name "Deborah" and the last name "Krat" written in a single continuous stroke.

Deborah Krat

May 2, 2006

Dear Ms. Kendrick,

I just want you to know how grateful I am that you were able to share your writing with us in such an open way. I had never been to a poetry reading before so this was a new and exciting experience for me. You are clearly a woman of great strength and dignity and I truly admire you. I was impressed with all of your work, especially the writing from "The Women of Plums" and your poem "Zithromax Waltz"- I thought it was extremely creative. Your writing has made a great impact and I'm sure it will continue to do so long after we are gone. I only hope I can somehow impact people with my life as much as you have. Again, thank you very much for coming and sharing your work with us.

Sincerely,  
Danielle Pelton

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Danielle Pelton", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Dear Dolores Kendrick,

I want to thank you again for coming to Lake Braddock and sharing your poetry, advice and answering questions. As an aspiring writer, it is always gratifying and enjoyable to meet an established poet.

First of all, I would like to thank you for the wonderful advice you gave us. I especially liked "Poetry is an art form." I had never heard anyone define poetry like that, although it couldn't be truer. Being able to write poetry is a gift, but a lot of work is necessary to create something that is actually art. By reminding me that poetry is an art form, you impressed on me the analogy of playing piano to writing poetry. To be able to perfect a piece, one must go over the song constantly, weigh every note, consider the drag and pull of the phrasing, tweak the balance of the hands, harmony, dynamics. Poetry is very much like that.

Your explanation of "channeling" the African American slave women was also very interesting. I always have that feeling when I write about my deceased grandparents—words, phrases and names I don't know seem to flow onto the paper. To me, however, it felt more like "channeling" information from a forgotten layer of the mind, not from a spirit, ghost or soul.

Again, I want to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule and coming to encourage young poets.

Best regards,

*Rachel H. Lim*

Rachel Lim